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Ned arrived on an earlier train than usual there was no one at the house to greet him except Teacher Ruth, who had just come in. She started up the stairs when a quick step on the piazza caused her to turn, and the next minute her hand was in Ned Gordon's.

"I did not know thee was coming so soon," she faltered. "Thy sister is away, and the children—where are they, I wonder?"

"How very nice!" replied the young man, with a happy laugh. "Isn't it warm? And I have been walking like a steam engine to get here as soon as possible. Come into the parlor where it is shady and cool. It is long ages since I saw you last."

"Shall I not get thee something cool to drink?" asked the girl as she surrendered her pile of books to him.

"No. 'Drink to me only with thine eyes, and I'll not ask for—anything. See what I found looking through the pickets of the fence as I came along—the first tiger of the season," and he placed the gorgeous lily in her hand.

"It will look well in that vase on the mantel there," said Teacher Ruth, moving toward it; but Ned laid his hand upon her arm.

"I gave it to you," he said. "Won't you make it happy by wearing it in your gown?"

She hesitated a moment, her eyes bent upon the lily.

"Thee knows I do not wear flowers," she said at last.

"I plucked it for thee," Ned persisted—he had begun to use "thee" quite daringly of late. "I give it to thee, and thou wilt wear it—ma chère amie."

Would she? At that moment a shadow darkened the doorway, and Mrs. Marston, with an exclamation of surprise, hurried in to welcome her brother. Teacher Ruth disappeared, and although she did not wear the lily that evening, it was not in the slender vase on the mantel-shelf.

Supper was partaken in an atmosphere of unusual quiet, the three youngest members of the family being greatly subdued by the knowledge of the earthquake that threatened. Very early they stole off to bed, and very loath they were to come down in the morning.

Strangely enough, however, the Victory was not missed until early in the evening, and then, as Mary had foretold, it was Uncle Ned who made the discovery.

"Hullo, Nan," he exclaimed, as he rambled, in a fit of restlessness, out into the hall, "what have you done with the Victory? I thought you had decided to keep her here."

"The Victory!" exclaimed Mrs. Marston, following him. "Why!" And then there was a dead silence, during which Jack grew big-eyed and dumb with terror in his corner, and Mary turned red and white by turns, while Harold, gifted with a greater presence of mind, made good his escape through a window.

Mrs. Marston stepped hastily back to the sitting-room, and the tell-tale faces of the two children declared their guilt to her.

"Where is my Victory?" she asked; but neither responded; only Mary burst into tears.

"Is it broken?" asked her mother. But the child shook her head.

"Where is it?" Mrs. Marston re-

peated; but silence was the only response.

"Where is Harold?" was her next question. And in answer to this, Uncle Ned suddenly disappeared into the garden, and speedily returned with a struggling, weeping boy under his arm.

"I don't care; it's all your fault," blubbered Harold. "Mary said you were so gone over that old statue you didn't care anything more about Teacher Ruth, and—and she wanted me to help her take it away till—till you forgot it. But I won't again—so there; and you can marry all the girls you want to without any heads or arms or—anything 'cept wings."

Harold ended with a long wail, and his uncle dropped him hastily on the sofa beside his brother.

Teacher Ruth had suddenly vanished, and all the children were crying aloud.

"Oh, Harold, don't!" Mary was gasping; and then, with scarlet cheeks and trembling voice, the shamefaced child faltered her confession.

"It isn't hurt at all, mamma," she cried. "I put my big doll's shawl around it last night, and I'm so—sorry!"

Mrs. Marston sat speechless before her erring offspring, but Uncle Ned leaned over Mary and kissed the hot little cheek.

"You dear little goose!" he whispered. "Bless you! Bless you!"

Then he likewise disappeared, and a blind instinct turned his step toward that shadowy walk in the garden which led to the boy's cave. There, in the gathering twilight, the winged Victory gleamed amid the leafy bower, chaste and cool and beautiful.

In the shadow of a drooping shrub someone else was gazing at the Grecian maiden, and Ned moved nearer and possessed himself of a warm living hand.

"Dear little goose! And she thought that cold, beautiful creature was winning my heart from thee—Ruth! Ruth! Thee refused to wear my lily, my colors. Does that mean that thee refuses me? Dear, for Mary's sake—for Mary's sake—"

Some half-hour later a breathless young man rushed into the parlor, where Mrs. Marston was still talking to the three sorry little folks who sat in a row before her.

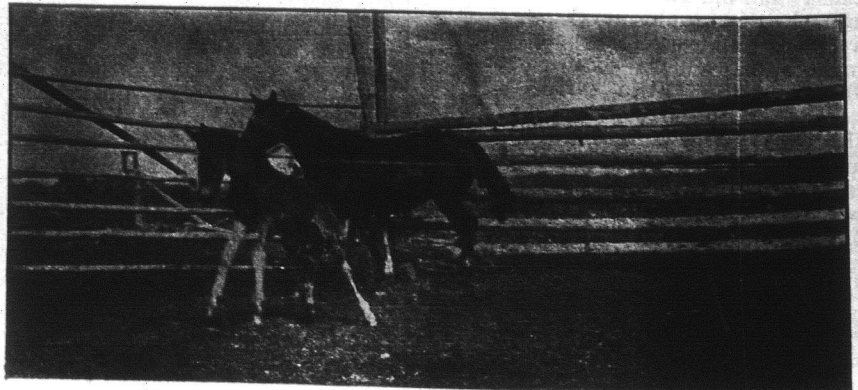
"Don't scold them any longer, Nan!" Uncle Ned exclaimed, as he snatched up his dress-suit case and turned toward the door. "My train leaves in ten minutes. I just looked in to tell Mary that the Victory is defeated for ever! Good-bye," and he was gone.

Mrs. Marston hurried out on the piazza, but only in time to see a tall black figure striding down the road. Against the gate leaned Teacher Ruth.

Ned's sister paused a moment to dash a sudden moisture from her eyes; then she went quickly down the path and slipped her arm about the girl.

"Teacher, Ruth," she whispered playfully, "tell me, have you ever had a thrill?"

Ruth turned and looked up at her with shy, glowing eyes. Against her soft muslin kerchief, rising and falling with every breath, lay a glorious tiger lily.



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